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ABSTRACT

This paper describes ways to initiate, organize, and administer a Learning to Read through the Arts and Humanities program, an interdisciplinary approach to reading instruction. The paper stresses that school and school district administrators involve teachers in the planning stages of the program to insure their interest in its success. The following steps are suggested for the program's implementation: a survey of community and school resources available for use in the program, assessment of staff needs, teacher training, preparation of objectives, and staff selection. (RL)

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INITIATING, ORGANIZING AND ADMINISTERING A LEARNING TO READ THROUGH THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES PROGRAM IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT AND A SCHOOL BUILDING

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Introduction

Unfortunately, when a fiscal problem occurs in a city or a community, education is one of the first services to be cut. It often appears that education is considered a vital service only by educators and parents of children attending school.

Those of us who are weathering the onslaught of budget cuts have had to examine various methods of re-designing our school organization to adjust to the fiscal problems without cutting out the "heart" of a well rounded educational program.

Some proponents of basic education often separate the basic skills of the "3 R's" from the Arts and Humanities which are sometimes considered "frills".

LTRTA is a basic skills program which gives equal stress to reading and the Arts. The program interrelates the arts within the reading program. Though this program stands on its own merits of tested methodology it also permits the school administration to integrate several curriculum areas; thereby fostering an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of reading, the Arts and the Humanities.

It is our intention to show how the LTRTA program does not cost a school district or a single school any more dollars than a "regular day program". By re-ordering priorities through assessing needs and availability of resources and staff this program can be implemented in any community or school site.

Students of education know that the public school system must constantly change its tasks, goals, and purposes if it is to meet the changing needs of society. This involves changes in the curriculum, the organizational structure, and the services provided.[1] It is further pointed out that the administrator encounters some resistance to change but if the administrator is truly a leader he cannot avoid change because change is inevitable.[2]

If it is the intent to implement this program, the administrator of the district or the school must have a personal commitment to the belief that the arts and humanities are an integral part of the whole curriculum. We, at the Roosevelt Island Schools, District 2, New York City, had such a commitment.[3] While we are located in the middle of the East River and are often referred to as "Manhattan's Other Island", we are but minutes and a tramway ride away from rich resources which are available to enhance this program. However, we recognized the need to choose carefully, in the beginning stages with cultural institutions we wished to affiliate. The criterion used included the institutions' commitment to the philosophy of the program, their desire to work with school-age children, whether they be culturally deprived, below grade level, artistic, from a low or high socio-economic background.[4] We also worked

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1 Morplett, Edgar L. Johns, Roel; Reller, Theodore L., Educational Organization and Administration (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1967-p.145)
2 IBID - pp. 145-146
3 Charlotte Schiff, Principal/Director, Roosevelt Island Schools, PS/IS 217M
Bernadette O'Brien, Educational Director, Learning to Read Through the Arts Foundation, Inc., Program Coordinator, Roosevelt Island Schools
4 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum - Yearly Exhibition "A Year with Children"

through a foundation[5] to interest industry, patrons of the arts, citizens interested in bettering education to help support our program.

We are, therefore, recommending that before planning for implementation of the program one should investigate the resources available in the community. Any number of the following resources in a community can be used as part of the curricula; artists, artisans, musicians, actors, dancers, singers, theatre groups, museums, literary magazines, newspapers, industry, volunteer groups as tutors, colleges and universities.

Once you have identified available resources you can then proceed to determine what role you wish them to play in the program.

You would also want to assess what materials and facilities you have available in your school or district; such as, reading materials, commercial and teacher made, art materials, musical instruments, industrial arts equipment, home economics materials, photography supplies, a gymnasium, auditorium or large group instruction areas, seminar rooms, multi-media materials and equipment. Any number of these components can become part of the LTRTA program.

When we integrated the LTRTA program into our "normal school day program" we utilized existing reading skills materials which were adopted according to pupils' needs into the philosophy of the LTRTA program by the reading specialist and the classroom teacher. Industrial Arts equipment, musical instruments, fine arts materials become part of our program.

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5 Learning to Read Through the Arts Foundation, Inc.
4 East 70 Street, New York, New York 10021, Natalie Lieberman, President

We used the expertise of our staff personnel; such as, our full time music teacher, part-time reading teacher, social studies teacher, and other staff members who were funded through other program grants.[6]

Mario Fantini points out that the organization of a system should serve to implement the objectives of the people within the system; that the system must be flexible and capable of changing to meet new situations. People in an organization, rather than an organizational structure, will determine how well an organization (district or school) will work.[7]

Every educational institution has a wealth of talent; the secret is to tap that talent and to provide the vehicle for the talent to provide the optimum educational program possible.

Direct involvement of staff involves the following stages of planning:

Assessment of District and School Needs

It should be recognized that while a district which encompasses many schools has many needs whether they be for specific children, for community involvement and input, for political action or any other reasons; individual schools too have many needs to be met for the children, such as

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6 Museums Collaborative - Folk Artists in the Schools - Baschett Musical Sculptures - Learning to Read Through the Arts Incorporating Community Environments.

7 Fantini, Mario D., Young, Milton A; Designing Education for Tomorrow's Cities (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970 p. 92

a remedial program for the slow learner or the underachiever or an enrichment program for the more gifted or for the "uninspired". In both districts and schools, administrators need to serve as catalysts to inspire and encourage communities, parents and teachers to be forward looking and to assess their programs if they are truly meeting the needs of the participants. How is this achieved?

On a district level the chief school administrator can turn to the school board, parents council, the community arts council, teacher organizations (local and national), district principals to assess the needs for such a program and to generate the interest for planning for program implementation.

On a school level, parent associations, school staff (teachers, para-professionals, school aides) and pupils should be surveyed as to the needs for implementing such a program. One should look at the present level of achievement, pupil interest and active participation in class, time spent in reading and the arts as well as the cost factors in operating the present program - assess what you have and what you lack and would like to have as part of an interdisciplinary program in reading, the arts and humanities.

2. Assessment of Staff Needs

Teachers as professionals know their strengths and weaknesses. A recent study reported by Wallace Z. Ramsey, University of Missouri at

St. Louis indicated that in a sample of 61 secondary school reading teachers, from 56 to 99 percent felt they were "adequate to very adequate" in teaching the skills of phonics, dictionary use and word meanings. Less than 1/3 felt adequate or very adequate in constructing appropriate tests, in diagnosing reading problems and in remedying reading problems.[8]

3. Planning with Staff to Meet the Educational Needs

This would include determining with the staff the kind of training they would find to be most beneficial and would be willing to participate in during or after school hours.

Teacher Training

One of the major resources for in-service training can be found from Learning to Read Through the Arts, Inc. Their educational director developed the prototype Title I program and the prototype day school program on Roosevelt Island, New York City.

In-service training by school system specialists or trained consultants can be accomplished during common preparation periods or voluntary attendance after school for in-service credit. Local colleges and universities can sponser programs that will train for a LTRTA program in the Arts, Humanities and Reading. Fordham University has a program in the Humanities[9] and calls upon the Educational Director of LTRTA[10] as a consultant in the college course.

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8 Ramsey, Wallace, Z; Better Teachers, Better Supervisors, Better Programs (Newark, Delaware, International Reading Association, 1975) p. 60

9 Fordham University, Dr. Olive Franks, Reading and the Arts

10 Bernadette C. O'Brien, Educational Director LTRTA Foundation, Inc.

Consultants from cultural institutions, colleges and universities can be used with grant monies obtained from Title I programs, Title IV C proposals, private sources, foundations, and industry. Professionals in other communities which have already established the LTRTA program also can be used as resource personnel.

Preparation of Objectives

A further stage in planning is the preparation of objectives, program objectives, staff objectives and pupil objectives.

The LTRTA program as developed in the "day school program" at Roosevelt Island had the following basic objectives:

To improve reading achievement
To increase interest, knowledge and skills in the art
To increase growth in artistic development
To improve self-esteem

Staff objectives included a voluntary agreement for commitment to carry the methodology of the program into school curricula, - to work as a team, the classroom teacher, the subject teacher and the specialist - to assess and meet the needs of the individual pupils for remediation and enrichment. Teachers prepared specific objectives based upon the needs of the students. Students as well are fully aware of the objectives of the program as it relates to them and their project. They too set goals.

The administrator has a key role in defining the ends toward which an organization strives. It is the administrator who must coordinate the efforts of all involved to attain those ends or objectives. It is the administration's responsibility to find the best methods of work for the staff.[11] This requires direct or indirect responsibility for the preliminary training of staff before the program begins and for keeping standards during the program's operation. As supervisors, we must give our staff detailed instructions as to what needs to be accomplished, work on a realistic time

line, and set goals to be reached. Methods and materials must be supplied for teachers to meet program objectives.

Performance standards can best be met when developed jointly by administration and staff. Using this method staff recruitment requirements become clearly defined for all.

Staff Selection

In implementing the LTRTA program staff selection is crucial. We know from research that a wide-range of talent is essential in the operation of a school system. Many references have been made for professional qualifications of personnel needed to implement any new program. Qualifications from the academic and cultural backgrounds of staff to the need for teachers whose attitude in personal and social adjustment allows for flexibility and change.[12]

Staff was selected based upon records of past performance, areas of expertise, recommendations and references, as well as educational credentials. Observation and interview techniques were used to assess teacher attitudes and feelings toward children. We gave preference to teachers who volunteered to work and to be trained in the LTRTA method. In a period of six months, as more workshops were brought into the program, word spread and more teachers requested to be part of a workshop program.

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11 Getzels, Jacob W. Lipham, James M; Campbell, Ronald F., Educational Administration as a Social Process (New York, Harper & Row, 1968), p. 28

12 Castetter, William B; The Personnel Function in Educational Administration (New York, MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc. 1971 Pp. 197-203

It has long been said, that we do not provide enough opportunity for content teachers in the intermediate and secondary schools to become oriented to the reading problems of students and to the methods and materials used in adjusting to the problems.[13] The LTRTA program extends to content area and teacher training in the methodology of teaching reading skills through the interdisciplinary approach, including all areas of the curriculum.

In the Roosevelt Island Schools we have had 4 programs which involved the sciences, social sciences and the arts. Consolidated Edison Co. sponsored the Arts and The People Workshop, an interrelated program of social sciences, the development of the industrial revolution and the role of electricity in the movement, a field science program where the children experimented with magnetism and electricity and the arts, fine arts, music, and drama, using the LTRTA methodology.

Another program encompassed environmental science, urban planning and design where eighth and ninth grade students studied map-making, constructed a wood and clay map of Roosevelt Island with plans for future development of the waterfront. This Wateredges Program used the LTRTA methodology.[14] The students were so engrossed in this school project that they have carried their efforts forth in the community after school hours.

A fifth and sixth grade class is working on preparing for an archeological dig which is part of the social studies curriculum using the LTRTA methodology.

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13 Opcit. Ramsey, Wallace p. 63
14 Wateredges Program sponsored by Community Environments

A second and third grade class is using science and the study of living things with the LTRTA methodology. They are preparing gardens to grow fruits, vegetables and plants as well as cooking foods, experimenting and writing recipes regarding their experience in this project. In addition, they are involved in an environmental - ecological study of their neighborhood, Roosevelt Island. They too are planning the best use of their community resources through a study of the soil, (a science based program), measuring and plotting the gardens (a mathematic program of geometric progression) reporting and writing their findings (a language arts program), illustrating and drawing different developmental stages of the program (arts component), learning specific vocabulary and integrating this into their every day life. This is truly an interdisciplinary program.

In all of these programs, the classroom teacher and the subject teachers are involved in the program and continue to use the methodology as part of normal classroom procedure.

In summary, it has been said that incentives should be given to staff personnel in order to stimulate desireable effect.[15]

As a working administrator of 12 years in an urban school setting I have come to believe that the greatest incentive an administrator can give to a teacher is a commitment of support and assistance. To be there when the teacher needs help, to encourage the teacher, to offer constructive criticism and praise. A teacher's greatest joy is to see accomplishment and growth and to be able to say proudly - "I helped Tommy, Maria and Peter today". "I've accomplished my goal".

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15 OPCIT, Getzels, Jacob W., et al p. 28